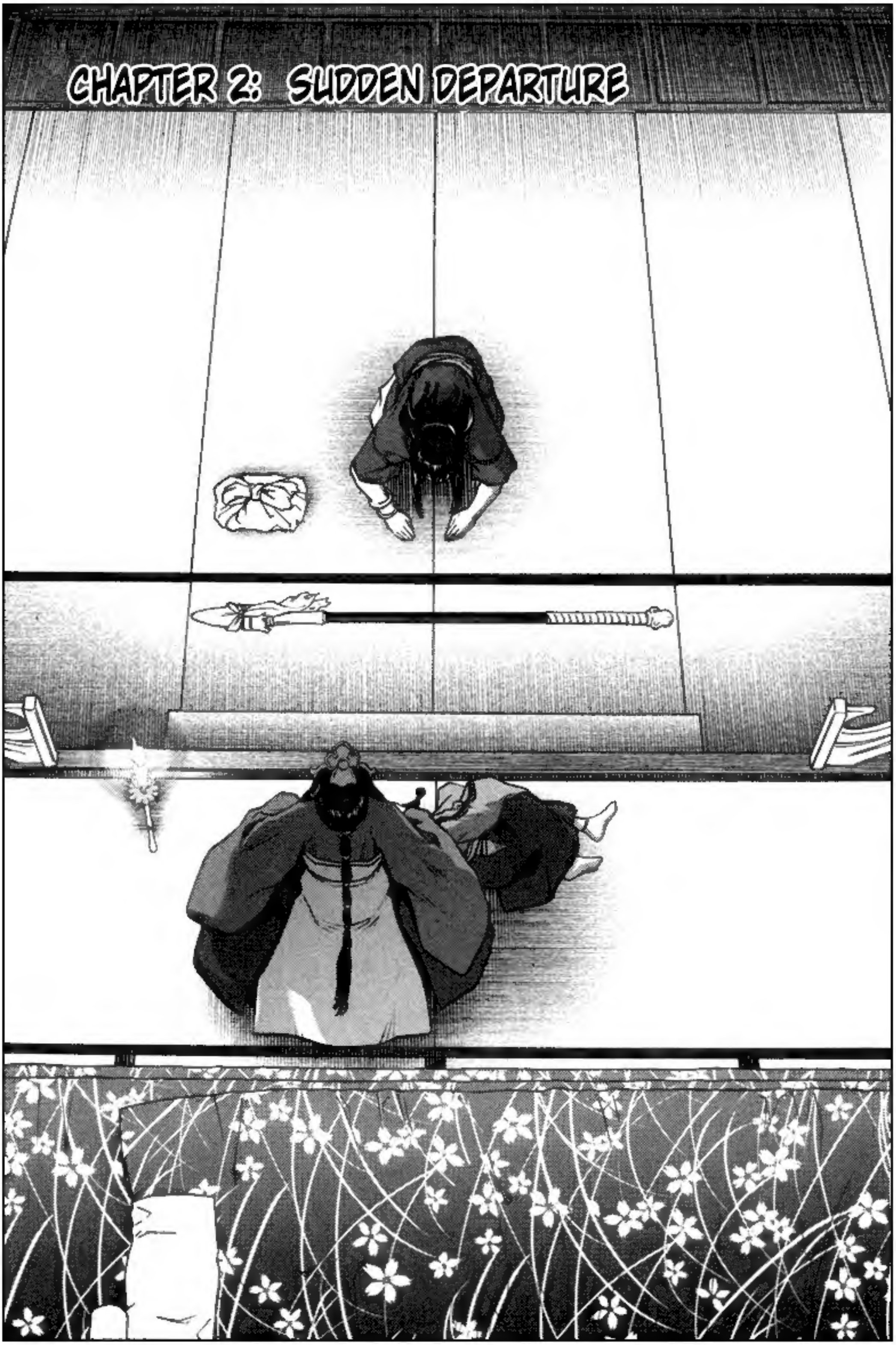
CHAPTER 2: SUDDEN DEPARTURE



POSSESSED BY A BEING NOT OF THIS WORLD?

I BELIEVE THEY ARE HEIRS OF THE "WAY OF HEAVEN", THE REASON OF HEAVEN MADE MANIFEST. THEY DIVINE THE STARS, KNOW OF DISTANT EVENTS AS THOUGH THEY WERE PRESENT, AND FORE-TELL THE FUTURE.

DO YOU KNOW WHAT STAR DIVIN-ERS ARE?

YES...

HEARING OF THIS CHILD'S CONDITION, THE EMPEROR SENT A STAR DIVINER CALLED GAKAI TO OBSERVE THE CHILD IN HIS SLEEP.

I CAN'T... MOVE...

!

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孔雀窓經

南無…

UNTRANSLATABLE CHANTING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

CLICK

カチッ

H-

HAVE YOU GONE MAD?!

……!!

FZZIT = LIGHT DISAPPEARS

HA HA HA

FZZIT

HOW DARE YOU!

WHAT IS GOING ON?! IS IT TRULY A PRINCE OF THE EMPIRE WHO LIES THERE?!

"SUCH A THING"...? WHAT WAS IT?!

NO TRUE SON OF THE EMPIRE WOULD BE POSSESSED BY SUCH A THING!

THE SLEEPER WILL DIE NOT SO FAR IN THE FUTURE FROM NOW.

YOU FORETELL THE PRINCE'S DEATH?!

!!

THEREFORE, I AM NOT FORETELLING THE DEATH OF A PRINCE!

A TRUE PRINCE WOULD NOT DIE A TRUE PRINCE WOULD NEVER BE POSSESSED BY SUCH A THING!

DROP

SOB
SOB SOB

WHY WOULD SUCH A DISASTER BEFALL THIS CHILD...

MOTHER ...

YOU! DID YOU INSULT MOTHER?!

NO, CHAGUM.. I WAS ASKING THIS WOMAN TO SAVE YOUR LIFE.

WAIT, PLEASE!

!!

CEASE TO BE A PRINCE?

!

PLEASE... LISTEN TO WHAT I HAVE TO SAY TILL THE END.

CHAGUM, YOU TOO... AFTER TONIGHT, YOU WILL CEASE TO BE A PRINCE...

!!

AND ORDERED THE SECRET ASSASSINATION OF THIS CHILD.

HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY PROBABLY HEARD OF THIS MATTER FROM THE STAR DIVINER, GAKAI...

WHY WOULD AN EMPEROR GIVE SUCH AN ORDER WITHOUT EVEN ATTEMPTING TO SAVE HIS OWN CHILD?

FATHER... FATHER DID...?!

THE POSSESSION OF A PRINCE WOULD DAMAGE HIS IMPERIAL MAJESTY'S PRESTIGE AS THE SON OF HEAVEN, AND THE EMPIRE'S PRESTIGE BY EXTENSION.

I DON'T UNDER-STAND.... I DON'T UNDER-STAND!!

CHAGUM.. RULING THIS EMPIRE IS OF PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE TO HIS MAJESTY. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT, DON'T YOU?

UNFORTUNATELY... I AM UNABLE TO AS WELL.

OF COURSE, I DID NOT DISCLOSE THE PRINCE'S IDENTITY AND PHRASED THE TURN OF EVENTS AS A RIDDLE.

GIVEN THAT THE MATTER SEEMED BEYOND A STAR DIVINER, I SECRETLY SENT A MESSAGE TO A SHAMAN HELD IN HIGH ESTEEM IN THE CAPITAL...

... I DID NOT ACCEPT THAT WILLINGLY, EITHER.

I'M SURPRISED YOU MANAGED TO GET IN TOUCH WITH HER!

!

WHAT IS THE SHAMAN'S NAME?

TOROGAI.

YOU KNOW MANY THINGS... ARE THE SHAMAN'S POWERS CERTAIN?

SHE WANDERS LIKE THE WIND ITSELF, SO IT IS HARD TO GET A HOLD OF HER...

!

AS FAR AS I KNOW, HER POWERS ARE GREAT!

IN ANY CASE, SHAMAN TOROGAI'S RESPONSE WENT LIKE THIS:

THAT WAS ALL.

I CANNOT SAY WHAT THAT "THING" IS WITH ANY CERTAINTY. HOWEVER, SHOULD IT BE WHAT WAS CONSIDERED LONG EXTINCT SINCE ANTIQUITY, THE POSSESSED WILL DIE WHEN HE FAILS TO PROTECT IT. IF HE CAN PROTECT IT UNTIL THE SUMMER SOLSTICE, HE SHOULD SURVIVE.

I COULD ONLY CLING TO THE ONE HOPE OFFERED IN HER MESSAGE...

TOROGAI DEPARTED FROM THE CAPITAL AFTER SENDING THAT MESSAGE AND IS NOW MISSING...

EVEN IF HE CANNOT LIVE AS ONE OF THE IMPERIAL FAMILY...

I WOULD LIKE THIS CHILD TO LIVE, NO MATTER WHAT...

AND... THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY OPEN TO ME IS THE ONE I HAVE RIGHT NOW.

IF HE LIVES, HE CAN AT LEAST KNOW THE JOYS OF LIFE.

PLEASE TAKE THIS AND PROTECT HIM.

I PREPARED A REWARD THAT NO COMMONER CAN POSSIBLY SPEND IN HIS ENTIRE LIFETIME...

JANGLE

THUD

BALSA.. YOU ARE STRONG!

I UNDERSTAND WHERE YOU ARE COMING FROM... HOWEVER, PERMIT ME THIS DISCOURTESY TO SAY THIS:

WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IS UTTERLY UNFAIR TO ME!

"UNFAIR"...? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!

!

WHETHER I REFUSE AND DIE OR ACCEPT AND CONTINUALLY RISK DEATH, BOTH PATHS LEAD TO CERTAIN DEATH...

ANYONE OF MY LOW STATION TOLD OF SUCH MATTERS WOULD HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO ACQUIESCE TO YOUR REQUEST, YOUR MAJESTY.

I AM INDEED UNFAIR...

I SEE...

WILL YOU DIE HERE NOW OR TAKE THE TREASURE AND GAMBLE ON SURVIVAL?

BALSA, YOU ARE CORRECT IN THAT I CANNOT LET YOU GO NOW THAT YOU KNOW OF THIS SECRET.

TWO BEHIND ME... TWO IN THE OUTSIDE CORRIDOR... THREE BEHIND YOU...

CHOOSE,

BALSA THE SPEAR-WIELDER!!

IT SEEMS YOU HAVE SURPRISINGLY FEW RETAIN-ERS YOU CAN TRUST.

SFX: SWIFT MOVEMENT

CLACK

SWING

DON'T MAKE A MOVE!!!

IF ANYONE MOVES, THIS SPEAR WILL PIERCE THE PRINCE!

.....

!?

I'LL BE TAKING THE TREASURE AND THE PRINCE.

I HAVE GONE A LITTLE TOO FAR. I JUST WANTED TO LET OFF SOME STEAM!

SMILE

I ACCEPT I WILL PROTECT HIM, EVEN IF IT WILL COST ME MY LIFE!
WHY WOULD I CHOOSE DEATH?

BALSA, I HAVE FAITH IN YOU!!

I HAVE FAITH IN YOU...

GO, CHAGUM! TRUST IN HER AS I DO!

IF YOU WANT THE PRINCE TO ESCAPE, SET FIRE TO HIS SLEEPING CHAMBER!

CHAMBER-LAIN! ARE YOU THERE?!

THEN LEAD US TO A SAFE ESCAPE ROUTE!

WE WILL MAKE IT SEEM AS THOUGH THE PRINCE IS DEAD... ALTHOUGH I'M SURE THEY'LL KNOW THE TRUTH BEFORE LONG.

JANGLE

I WILL TAKE JUST THE GEMSTONES. USING GOLD COIN STAMPED WITH THE IMPERIAL SEAL WILL ONLY HASTEN OUR DISCOVERY.

HOW LONG IT TAKES THEM WILL DECIDE WHETHER WE LIVE OR DIE...

THE PREPA-RATIONS ARE COMPLETE.

FAREWELL, YOUR MAJESTY!!

GRAB

BALSA!!

OF THE PRINCE...

PLEASE TAKE GOOD CARE...

...

I BELIEVE I AM WELL AWARE OF THE WEIGHT OF THOSE WORDS, YOUR MAJESTY.

FROM NOW ON, YOU ARE JUST CHAGUM.

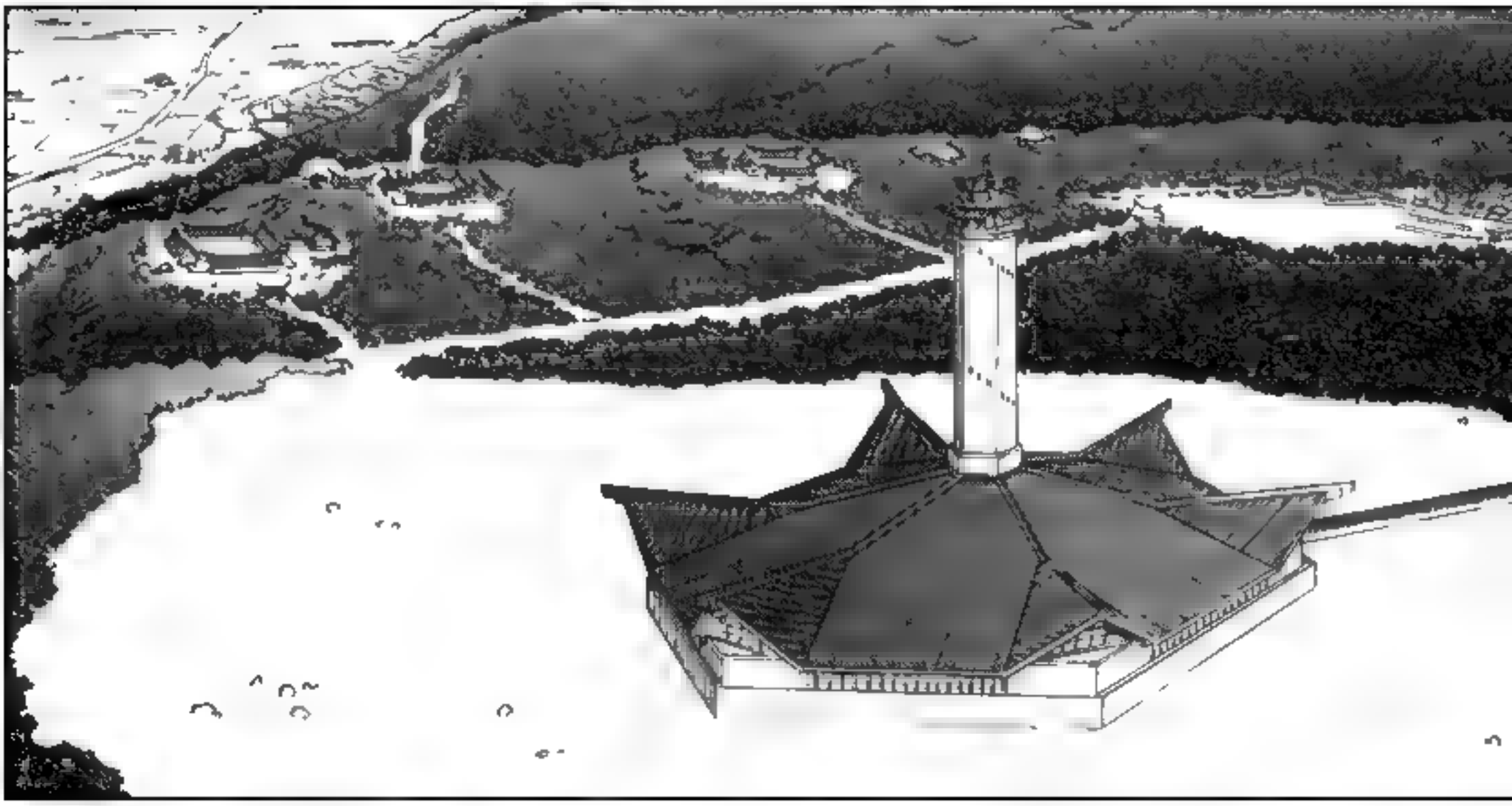
THE PRINCE YOU WERE DIED IN THAT FIRE...

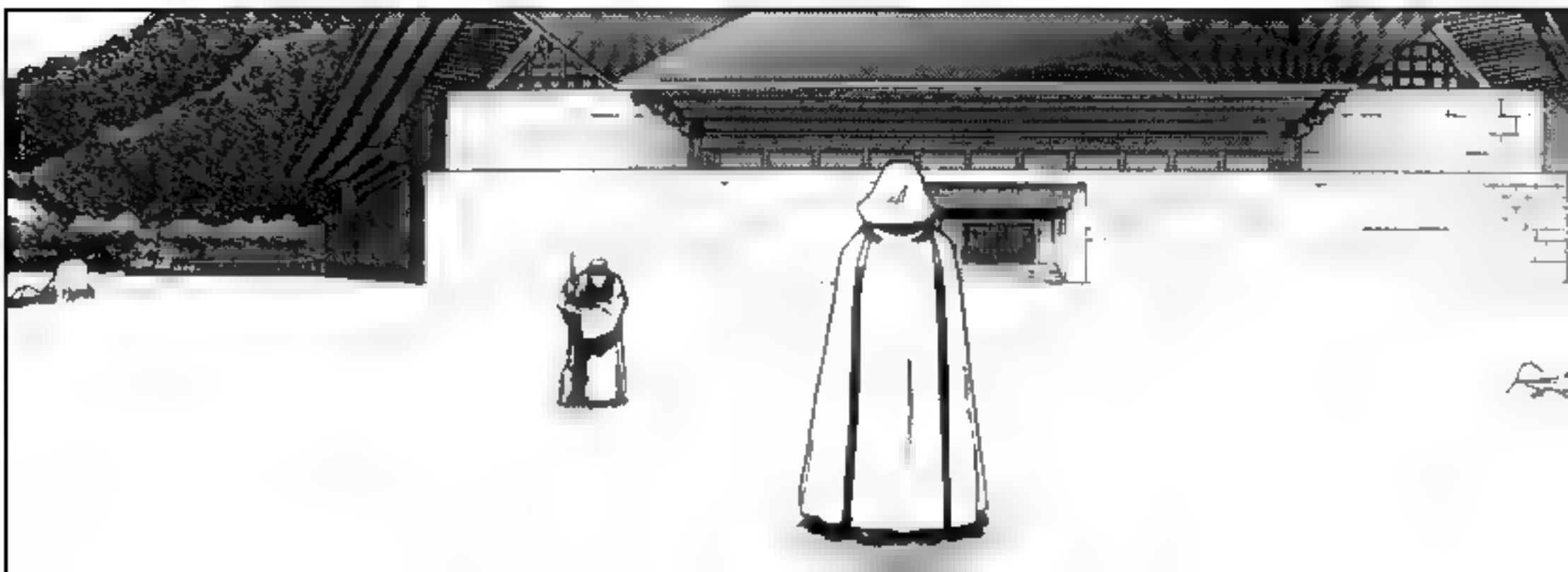
IT WILL BE HARD ON YOU, BUT YOU MUST BEAR IT AND SURVIVE. IF YOU DO, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO SEE YOUR MOTHER AGAIN SOME-DAY...

IS THAT UNDER-STOOD...?

THAT'S WHY I PLEADED TO LET ME HANDLE IT... IT WASN'T SOMETHING A MAN LIKE GAKAI COULD HANDLE. LOOK... THE SITUATION ONLY GETS WORSE AND WORSE...

THAT THING COULD NOT HAVE CAUSED A FIRE... ITS NATURE SHOULD BE THAT OF WATER...





HIS HOLINESS ISN'T IN MEDITATION.

WHITE CLOTH.. GOOD...

SLIDE

GAKAI...

WHAT IS YOUR BUSINESS WITH HIS HOLINESS? IF IT'S ABOUT THE SECOND PALACE, I JUST GAVE HIM A DETAILED REPORT.

IS THAT SO...

STILL, YOUR GARMENTS REEK OF SMOKE.

NO... I HAVE SOMETHING FROM YESTERDAY'S STAR DIVINATION I WISH TO REPORT TO HIS HOLINESS.

IS THAT YOU, SHUGA...?

YES, YOUR HOLINESS! IT IS I, SHUGA.

THAT IS BECAUSE I HAVE GONE TO SEE THE BURNED RUINS OF THE SECOND PALACE.

HMPH

YES, YOUR HOLINESS

ENTER. IT IS WELL THAT YOU CAME AT THIS TIME; I HAVE SOMETHING I WISH TO DISCUSS WITH YOU...

ARE YOU HERE REGARDING THE SECOND PALACE?

IT SEEMS LAST NIGHT ONE WAS A BUSY ONE.

I ALSO... WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS?

EARLIER, GAKAI WAS REJOICING, SAYING THE PRINCE HAS DIED IN THE FIRE AND THERE WAS NO LONGER ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT...

THEN WE SHARE THE SAME PURPOSE.

FORGIVE ME, YOUR HOLINESS, BUT I DISAGREE...

WHEN I FIRST HEARD OF THE PRINCE'S CONDITION, I RECALLED TWO THINGS:

FIRST, THE WATER DEMON SAID TO HAVE BEEN DEFEATED BY THE HOLY FOUNDING FATHER, EMPEROR TORGAL, IN THE OFFICIAL FOUNDING HISTORY...

SECOND, THE DROUGHT SIGN THAT HAS BEGUN TO APPEAR IN THE HEAVENS SINCE AROUND SUMMER SOLSTICE-TIME LAST YEAR...

I THEN FOUND SOMETHING QUITE CURIOUS...

I WONDERED WHAT THE CONNECTION WAS, SO I READ ALL THE ANCIENT BOOKS I HAD AT MY DISPOSAL.

IN ADDITION, I FOUND A DISTURBING RECORD DATING BACK-A HUNDRED YEARS THAT A DEMON APPEARED AND DEVOURED OR RIPPED APART A CHILD...

THIS PENINSULA HAS BEEN BESET BY A MAJOR DROUGHT APPROXIMATELY EVERY HUNDRED YEARS MANY TIMES IN THE PAST.

HMM... IT IS EVEN MENTIONED IN THE OFFICIAL FOUNDING HISTORY THAT THE YAKUE TELL OF A DEMON THAT APPEARS ONCE EVERY HUNDRED YEARS AND DEVOURS A CHILD'S SOUL...

THIS RECORD IS TOO SIMILAR TO THE WATER DEMON'S TALE IN THE OFFI-CIAL FOUNDING HISTORY.

THIS YEAR IS THE VERY YEAR THAT COMES BUT EVERY HUNDRED YEARS... I CANNOT BELIEVE THIS TO BE A MERE COINCI-DENCE!

IT IS DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT THIS FIRE WAS CAUSED BY A DEMON... IT CLEARLY DEVIATES FROM THE DISASTERS THAT HAVE BEFALLEN THE PRINCE THUS FAR.

IF MY SPECULATIONS ARE CORRECT, THE NATURE OF THE DEMON POSSESSING THE PRINCE IS THAT OF WATER!!

.....

I SHOULD HAVE ENTRUSTED THE TASK TO YOU WHEN YOU FIRST MADE THE REQUEST...

HM.. IT APPEARS I DID CHOOSE WRONGLY.

THOUGH GAKAI IS YOUR SENIOR, IT APPEARS THE BURDEN WAS TOO GREAT FOR HIM.

VERY WELL... YOU'RE STILL TOO YOUNG, BEING ONLY 20, BUT IT SEEMS YOU ARE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN BECOME MY RIGHT HAND MAN.

.....

NOD

YES ..

ONCE YOU BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE DARKER SIDE OF POLITICS, YOU WILL START UPON A PATH FROM WHICH THERE IS NO RETURN.. DO YOU STILL WISH IT?

IF YOU BECOME INVOLVED... YOU WILL SEE AND MUST ACCEPT THE DARKER SIDE OF THIS STAR PALACE...

I WILL SAY ONE MORE THING...

HM ...

I HAVE BEEN TAUGHT THAT THE WORLD IS COMPRISED OF BOTH LIGHT AND DARK...

I WILL ENCOUNTER BOTH SOONER OR LATER AS A STAR DIVINER. NO MATTER HOW DARK AND TWISTED THE PATH MAY BE, IF IT LEADS TO THE HEAVENS... I INTEND TO WALK IT.

VERY WELL...

.....

THAT THOUGHT WILL BE THE ONLY LIGHT TO SHINE UPON YOUR PATH.

THERE IS NOW NO ONE ELSE HERE!

SFX: SWIFT MOVEMENT

WELL THEN, SHUGA..

ONE DOES NOT NEED TO BE A STAR DIVINER TO IMAGINE THE CONSE-QUENCES...

THE HOLY FOUNDING FATHER PURIFIED THIS LAND BY DEFEATING THE WATER DEMON... SHOULD IT BECOME KNOWN TO THE PEOPLE THAT THE CHILD OF HIS DESCENDANT, THE EMPEROR, HAS BECOME POSSESSED BY A WATER DEMON...

THE FIRST ATTEMPT WAS MADE AT THE HOT SPRINGS, THE SECOND AT AOYUMI RIVER YESTERDAY. BOTH WERE TO APPEAR AS ACCIDENTS, BUT FAILED...

THAT IS WHY HIS MAJESTY ORDERED THE SECOND PRINCE'S ASSASSINATION.

!!

YES... I PLANNED THOSE ATTEMPTS.

WATER... BOTH INVOLVED WATER!!

AND WE NOW KNOW THAT WATER IS INVOLVED...

I THOUGHT THAT IF THE PRINCE'S LIFE WAS ENDANGERED, THE THING POSSESSING HIM WILL SHOW ITS TRUE NATURE.

I HAD THOUGHT OF USING FIRE AFTER WATER FAILED... BUT TOO MANY ATTEMPTS SO SOON WOULD RAISE SUSPICION. I AM NOT THAT FOOLISH..

HA HA...

THEN LAST NIGHT'S FIRE WAS...!

I HEARD IT WAS HER OWN DECISION TO SEND A MESSAGE TO SHAMAN TOROGAI.

I SUSPECT THE SECOND EMPRESS HAD A HAND IN IT... SHE IS CLEVER IN HER OWN WAY.

SHE COULD HAVE JUST RECEIVED A REWARD, BUT THEY WENT THROUGH THE TROUBLE TO INVITE HER AND HAVE HER STAY THERE.

AND ONE MORE THING... I HAVE INTEL THAT THE FEMALE BODYGUARD WHO RESCUED THE PRINCE FROM THE RIVER HAD BEEN INVITED TO THE SECOND PALACE.

I SEE...

SHE APPARENTLY DISAPPEARED UNNOTICED SOMETIME DURING THE COMMOTION RAISED BY THE FIRE.

A WANDERER, BALSA THE SPEARWIELDER... SHE IS APPARENTLY FAMOUS FOR HER SKILLS. I AM SURE SHE IS A FORMIDABLE WOMAN.

SO YOU BELIEVE THAT THE EMPRESS ENTRUSTED THE PRINCE TO HER...!

JUST WHO IS THIS FEMALE BODYGUARD?

HUNTERS?

I HAVE SENT HUNTERS AFTER TOROGAI, WHO RECEIVED THE EMPRESS' MESSAGE, AND INTEND TO DO THE SAME FOR BALSA.

SFX: MOVEMENT

?

!!

YOU WILL BECOME THE THIRD TO KNOW.

THEY ARE HUNTERS IN THE HIDDEN SERVICE OF THE EMPEROR. ONLY THE EMPEROR AND I KNOW WHO THEY ARE...

TMI-SCANS PRESENTS
SEIREI NO MORIBITO
GUARDIAN OF THE SACRED SPIRIT

BY: FUJIWARA KAMUI

CLEANERS:
VATO LOCO!
ALLASHANDRA
CHARMED BUTTERCUP

TRANSLATOR:
RUNPSICAT

TYPESETTER:
ALLASHANDRA

A SPECIAL THANK YOU GOES OUT ANIME-KRAZE FANSUBS AT
WWW.ANIME-KRAZE.ORG
TMI'S HOME ON THE WEB IS AT WWW.FMAHQ.COM